



Leadership Strategies for Employee Engagement in Healthcare Organizations

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Abstract: Every organization deals with employee engagement issues but certainly no other industry is so directly linked with patient (customer) satisfaction, and saving lives. The primary aim of healthcare organizations is to serve patients that too many a times at a very critical time in their lives. Delivering high quality patient care and providing it with high concern is exceptionally crucial. Moreover it is no secret that today's healthcare environment is faced with a lot of unique challenges by healthcare leaders and healthcare professionals. Every day they are encountered with new pressures that too at a record pace. Engaging healthcare professionals is becoming an increasing problem for healthcare leaders because of various reasons like high turnover rate, rapid technological changes, scarcity in talent and presence of multi-generational workforce within healthcare organizations. It is essentially critical for healthcare leaders to increase engagement levels of healthcare professionals' as they are the one who frequently interacts with patients and if they feel disconnected with the healthcare organization or facility they work, it certainly will have an impact on the performance of the healthcare organizations' and will reflect in financial implications too. Given the scenario, it is high time for healthcare leaders' to formulate and implement appropriate strategies in a compelling way to engage healthcare professionals.

Keywords: Healthcare Organizations, Leadership Strategies, Employee Engagement, Healthcare Leaders, Healthcare Professionals

I. Introduction

Essentially, healthcare organizations' are established to cater to the physical and emotional needs of the patients. Healthcare organizations' may not be able to fulfill these needs effectively without engaging healthcare professionals' working in the healthcare organization. In order to redesign, enhance and provide quality healthcare services', healthcare professionals' engagement is very significant. Healthcare organizations' may have various systems and policies in place to make sure that patients' always receive high quality healthcare services with efficient care. Unlike these systems and processes followed in manufacturing products with the use of standardized and emotionless raw materials to satisfy customers, healthcare organizations' systems and processes must be adaptable to cater the needs of patients' requirement such as physical and emotional needs which can be achieved only when healthcare professionals' are engaged. Primary aim of engaging healthcare professionals' is that all the healthcare professionals' should be able to make a contribution to the continuous improvement and successful functioning of the healthcare organization. It is all about creating an environment where healthcare professionals' are motivated to connect with their service and really care about delivering high-quality patient care with their minds and hearts. Therefore, healthcare leaders' should formulate and implement the following strategies to engage healthcare professionals in their healthcare organizations'.

II. What is Employee Engagement?

According to The Corporate Leadership Council (2004), Engagement is "the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organisation, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment".

Why Employee Engagement in Healthcare Organizations?

As providers of healthcare, health care organizations' will require familiarizing itself to a very diverse marketplace as they are positioned to witness remarkable change in the next decade and succeeding in the midst of this change will certainly demand a highly engaged healthcare professionals'. As for as healthcare leaders' are concerned, there lays an augmented level of responsibility for them to play an impactful role expectantly in an

optimistic way to enhance the healthcare professionals' engagement levels. Essentially, the success of healthcare organizations' will primarily depends upon how effectively healthcare leaders' manages healthcare professionals'

Table: 1 Consequences of Disengagement of Employees

2017, Employee Engagement /loyalty Statistics		Source
The Mental HealthAmerica	Disengaged workers cause massive losses in productivity – between \$450 and \$500 billion a year	http://www.mentalamerica.net/sites/default/files/mind the workplace-mha workplace health survey 2017 final.pdf
The Conference Board	According to <u>The Engagement Institute</u> , Disengaged employees cost organizations between \$450 and \$550 billion annually	http://www.conference-board.org/dna-engagement2017/
Mercer	34% of employees say they plan to leave their current role in the next 12 months	http://www.mercer.com/our-thinking/global-talent-hr-trends.html
IBM	40% of employees leave their job because they are unhappy with it	http://public.dhe.ibm.com/common/ssi/ecm/en/low14354usen/collaboration-and-talent-solutions-ibm-collaboration-solutions-lo-white-paper-external-low14354usen-20170804.pdf
Mental Health America	71% of workers said they are looking to change employers	http://www.mentalamerica.net/workplace-wellness
SHRM	68% of the human resource professionals say last year they experienced recruiting difficulty and skill shortages for certain types of jobs	http://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/pages/2017-employee-benefits.aspx

engagement. Needless to say that there is a necessity to design an effective work environment to engage healthcare professionals since there is a huge demand to attract and retain healthcare professionals' and poor engagement levels of healthcare professionals will lead to healthcare organization's collapse as that what they perform every day in the healthcare organization correlates closely with patient satisfaction and clinical quality.

Leadership Strategies for Employee Engagement in Healthcare Organizations

The following paragraphs discusses with various primary leadership strategies for employee engagement in healthcare organizations

Compensation and Benefits

As presently multi-generational healthcare professionals' are working in healthcare organizations, healthcare leaders' should assess the varied expectations of different generations and should accordingly design compensation and benefits. Compensation and Benefits has been one of the significant contributors to employee engagement and so healthcare leaders' should ensure the provision of competitive compensation and benefits in comparison with the local market to all the segments of healthcare professionals' working in the healthcare organization. If healthcare professionals' are unsatisfied with their compensation and benefits that are provided to them, they may be disengaged and try to seek securing new positions elsewhere. Undoubtedly, healthcare professionals seek to meaningful jobs and career development opportunities above all, but compensation and benefits and perks like paid time-off, flexible to balance work and life issues, designing various programmes and benefits to ensure healthy lifestyles and to support their mental and emotional well-being. Benefits may also include free or discounted assessments to healthcare professionals' treatment and various options for coverage of

medical and dental expenses, life and accidental insurance, parents and dependents' counseling, crisis intervention, continuation of income during short-term illness, educational assistance etc.,

Performance Management

A quickly changing healthcare environment will lead to the inclination for short-term goal achievements at regular intervals in turn leading to short-term performance appraisal systems. Healthcare leaders' should try to eliminate rating of healthcare professionals' and should promote continuous feedback with regular interactions. Feedback related to their delivery of patient care can be given either half-yearly, quarterly or even on quarterly basis to effectively engage healthcare professionals'. Healthcare leaders' should make the performance management system more of conversational mode rather than making it as a sheer metric based evaluation. This will certainly help to achieve a constructive performance culture rather than criticizing healthcare professionals' performance or finding fault with their healthcare services. Healthcare leaders' should try also to create qualitative KRAs which will enable them to identify key development areas based on regular interactions. Healthcare leaders' need to take steps to make healthcare professionals' to understand the importance of their high-quality delivery of patient service and how it significantly helps to achieve healthcare organization's overall mission to increase the engagement levels.

Rewards and Recognition

An effective reward and recognition program is vital to keep healthcare professionals engaged thereby, healthcare leaders' can build a culture such that employees are being thanked and respected for their good work done. Consequently, healthcare professionals may begin to relate their achievements with satisfaction thereby bonding with the healthcare organization in an emotional way. Healthcare leaders' should ensure that specific outcomes and behavior are rewarded appropriately as it will act as a positive reinforcement to produce same kind of expected results and exhibit such desirable behavior more often. Practicing a strong reward and recognition programme definitely demands extra time and attention from healthcare leaders' but it certainly sends a right message among healthcare professionals that an employees' good work done in the healthcare organization is being noticed and appreciated. It is very important for the healthcare leaders' to analyze each individual healthcare professional needs and wants as it will differ from one healthcare professional to another healthcare professional and accordingly suitable rewards and recognition programmes should be designed and implemented in a timely manner. When healthcare professionals' are made aware that their healthcare organization is more concerned about their achievements and rewards, they try to exceed their goals. However, timeliness in rewards and recognition to healthcare professionals' is very critical and healthcare organization's culture should be built in such a way that sooner than later healthcare professionals will be rewarded when expected results are achieved as it will enhance healthcare professionals' engagement levels and subsequently their commitment towards achieving organizational goals.

Career Development

Healthcare leaders' need to assess each individual healthcare professional's talent and should provide suitable career development opportunities along with training, professional development or continuing education to suit their abilities and needs so that fulfillment of potential can be achieved. Providing Career development opportunities for healthcare professionals' should be made as an integral part of healthcare organization as it serves as a best motivating tool for increased employee engagement. Healthcare professionals may flock to other healthcare organization's when there are no suitable career development opportunities. Provision of suitable career development opportunities will surely enhance healthcare professional's skills and expertise in their respective domain areas and in turn they can provide their service to the patients in a better manner. This leads to increase in healthcare professional's self-esteem in turn enhancing engagement level. When healthcare employees are engaged, they may not leave the healthcare organization because of provision of career development opportunities thus organization can save costs significantly in search of a new suitable candidate.

Inter-Personal Relationship with Immediate Supervisor

It is important for immediate supervisors' to nurture cordial and caring relationships with healthcare professionals so that they can generate greater levels of engagement. It makes sense that when healthcare professionals are serving the patients, have the confidence of understanding that their immediate supervisor cares about them, they feel more valued and go the extra mile. Moreover, when these healthcare professionals feel valued they will certainly pass on the same positive feeling to their patients and will serve them better. Immediate supervisors' should try to have face to face interactions with their healthcare professionals in order to build the emotional bonding. By this way, immediate supervisors' can build the required connection between individual healthcare professional's goals and hospital's overall strategy.

Trust in Senior Leadership

Many a times, healthcare leaders' find it difficult to measure the impact of employee engagement on their hospital performance. It is their duty to nurture a culture of engagement in the hospital that inspires all healthcare professionals. Healthcare leaders' needs to demonstrate right kind of attitude and actions in their hospital so that it will inspire all the healthcare professionals' to work towards achieving the set strategic goals and vision of the hospital. Healthcare leaders' should give ample opportunities to voice healthcare professionals' opinions so that they will understand that their opinions are heard and considered too. Senior healthcare leaders' should foster hospital's culture in a way that every healthcare professional is made to feel that there is openness in communication to keep healthcare professionals' engaged. It is also the prime responsibility of the healthcare leaders' to make healthcare professionals' to feel that the healthcare service they provide to the patients' helps not only the patient but the patient's entire family. In order to maintain employee engagement at high levels, Healthcare leaders' should communicate to the healthcare professionals' about the importance of the healthcare professional's service to patients and community so that they feel proud of their service and feel engaged.

Pride in Working for the Company

Though there is no guarantee that all the healthcare professionals working in the healthcare organization will beam with pride, it is the duty of the healthcare leaders' to build a culture that is purely based on trust. Healthcare professionals should be made understand by narrating various real-time examples as to how healthcare professionals' service impacts the patient care and the community at large. Healthcare leaders' should provide the required freedom to perform healthcare professionals' job by providing them with clear goals by providing them both positive and critical feedback in order to serve the community better. Building a culture of mutual respect, freedom to express their ideas certainly will make the healthcare professional to feel proud of the healthcare organization they work for in turn increases the engagement levels.

Measuring Employee Engagement

Healthcare leaders' should note that effective people management in the hospital cannot be undertaken as an annual performance review. It should be carried out on a continuous basis. Measuring employee engagement demands healthcare leaders' time and resources. Regular face-to-face discussions, surveys through questionnaires either online or offline should be conducted by healthcare leaders' to measure the engagement levels of healthcare professionals. Engagement survey results should be carefully analyzed and healthcare professionals should decide upon the future course of actions to further improve the engagement level of healthcare professionals. Exit interviews should be conducted to understand the various causes for key healthcare professionals leaving the healthcare organization and should be reviewed thoroughly to eliminate negative elements, if there is any, in the hospital environment. It is the healthcare leaders' duty to ensure that all the healthcare professionals' feel confident to express their opinions and suggestions openly without any fear of repercussions. Healthcare leaders' should always encourage healthcare professionals to give their valuable feedback related to the well-being of the hospital in order to serve the patients better otherwise healthcare professionals' will become disheartened subsequently leading to disengagement of healthcare professionals.

III. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, engaged healthcare professionals' will show enhanced interest in their work and will be willing to 'go the extra mile' for their healthcare organization. It is imperative for healthcare leaders' to focus more on formulating and implementing appropriate leadership strategies as discussed above to engage healthcare professionals as the effectiveness with which healthcare organizations manage their healthcare professionals will predominantly determine their success in all other fronts. A more positive and engaging work environment in healthcare organizations' will certainly drive delivery of high-quality healthcare service and operational performance. However, healthcare leaders' strategies need to be formulated and implemented in such a way that these strategies has the capacity to effectively manage rapid changes in various spheres of healthcare environment which will act as a hall-mark for an high performing healthcare organization.

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